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Media Release

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Biden Urges Delawareans to Protect Themselves Against Hurricane Scams *Criminals may launch home repair or charity scams to profit from storm damage*

WILMINGTON – Delaware Attorney General Beau Biden warned Delawareans today to protect themselves against scam artists trying to fraudulently make money in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene.

“Delawareans up and down the state have come together to help their neighbors in the wake of the hurricane, but the sad fact is that there are criminals who are always looking to take advantage of innocent people following a natural disaster” Biden said. “Whether you are repairing damage to your home or yard, or looking to donate to a charity to help others, there are a few steps you should take to ensure you do not fall victim to a scam.”

Biden asked anyone who suspects they have been scammed or have received a suspicious call or email to immediately call the Attorney General’s toll-free Consumer Hotline at 1-800-220-5424 or email the Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Unit at consumer.protection@state.de.us.

“The sooner someone lets us know they suspect a criminal is trying to prey on them the sooner we can act to hold the offenders accountable,” Biden said.

Biden suggested that homeowners needing to hire a service to repair their houses or clean up debris from their yards should take the following steps:

- Be wary of door-to-door solicitations
- Obtain at least three bids for a project
- Do not pay the full amount up-front; don’t make your final payment until the work is completed to your satisfaction
- Always obtain a written proposal, including cost estimate; consider obtaining multiple proposals and cost estimates
- Insist that contractors show proof that they are licensed and insured
- Use established and well-recommended contractors; obtain and contact references of past customers
- Check with the county or city to see whether a contractor is licensed or registered and whether permits and inspections are required for the work

- Check out a contractor by contacting the Better Business Bureau at 302-230-0108 or <http://delaware.bbb.org>

Charity scams have routinely popped up following recent natural disasters, including this year's earthquake and tsunami in Japan and last year's earthquake in Haiti. The Consumer Protection section of Biden's Web site – www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov – offers interested Delawareans general tips on avoiding scams. Tips include not responding to unsolicited requests for donations, asking for written information about a charity, being suspicious of copy-cat charities with similar sounding names as established organizations, and refusing high-pressure tactics.

Biden also encouraged Delawareans to check up on specific charities before making a donation by visiting the Better Business Bureau at www.bbb.org, Charity Navigator at www.charitynavigator.org, or the American Institute of Philanthropy at www.charitywatch.org where they can view lists of verified charities and find additional information on how to protect themselves against becoming a victim of a scam.

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